



# ***National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group***

## ***Preparedness Strategy***

### ***Fire Season 2004***

***Strategic Direction to Optimize Firefighting Capability***

***Prepared on May 1, 2004***

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The National Preparedness Strategy Plan was prepared on May 1, 2004. The Preparedness Strategy will be updated as the season progresses and as fire activity warrants. Preparedness Strategy updates will be numbered and dated as they are added to this document.

At this time the federal agencies' response to the recently released National Transportation Safety Bureau (NTSB) report regarding large airtankers is uncertain. However, if a decision is made that substantively affects the availability of nationally contracted large airtankers for the 2004 fire season, we will develop a contingency plan and promptly issue an update to this strategy.

## **Introduction**

The National Multi-Agency Coordination (NMAC) group consists of one representative from the following agencies: Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Forest Service (FS), National Association of State Foresters (NASF), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency – United States Fire Administration (FEMA-USFA), who have been delegated authority by their respective agency directors to manage wildland fire operations on a national scope when fire management resource shortages are probable. The delegated authorities include:

- Provide oversight of general business practices between the National Multi-Agency Coordination (NMAC) group and the Geographic Area Multi-Agency Coordination (GMAC) groups.
- Establish priorities among geographic areas.
- Direct, control, and allocate resources among or between geographic areas to meet NMAC priorities.
- Implement decisions of the NMAC.

This strategic direction optimizes firefighting capabilities as the tempo and severity of the season escalates. Likely scenarios include:

- Multiple large wildland fires burning in several geographic areas simultaneously.
- Demand for firefighting resources remains high.
- As season progresses, fires take hold in “long interval” fire regimes where resistance to control will become more difficult.
- Contingency resources (military, National Guard, foreign specialists) are engaged.
- High social/political anxiety as efforts move from offensive-oriented strategies to defensive-oriented strategies.
- Fireline supervision and command oversight will be limiting factors in determining, safe effective span-of-control.
- Resources are requested and/or committed to Initial National Response Plan Taskings.

The Federal Fire and Aviation Operations Action Plan introduces operational expectations, reinforces performance, and clarifies existing policies and procedures. It provides for consistent implementation of policy by Agency Administrators, Incident/Area Command Teams, and fire and aviation management personnel (Refer to Appendix 1).

Preparedness Plans direct activity for responding to increasingly severe situations (Refer to Appendix 2). The NMAC and Geographic Area MAC Groups (GMAC) will coordinate closely to assess the situation and needs. These groups work with operational entities such as incident management teams, local law enforcement, local fire service and state departments of emergency management to implement action (Refer to Appendix 3

for a summary of the basic roles and responsibilities of these entities). The NMAC will issue direction based on:

- **Predictive models:** Using Predictive Services to provide general prognosis of upcoming fire activity, and a more specific, state-by-state evaluation to anticipate critical fire situations.
- **Prioritization Criteria:** An overall strategy that guides decision-making in setting national priorities for wildland fire management agencies.
- **Strategic Points:** A set of strategic perspectives on national emphasis areas in risk mitigation, assessment of people and equipment capability, fire complexity, and innovative ideas to mitigate problem areas.

## **National Priorities**

With respect to the Initial National Response Plan and Department of Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HSPD-5), dated February 28, 2003, the priorities for the use of wildland fire resources are:

1. **Firefighter and public safety.** Human life is our number one priority.
2. **Detection and Initial Action.** During priority setting, when resources are unavailable or when resources must be committed to meet imminent public safety/community protection needs, the proper decision to be made by the Agency Administrator may be to defer immediate initial action on some fires and to direct resources to higher priorities.
3. **Community assets and infrastructure at risk.** Long-term effects on communities, subdivisions, significant community infrastructure and significant community assets must be considered when allocating resources. Concentrating efforts on protecting isolated structures, for example, cannot be justified if natural resources needed for the well-being of a community are threatened.
4. **Cost containment on large fires.** We must elevate cost containment commensurate with other objectives. Managers must exercise their authority to set priorities and select strategies that reduce costs.

## **National Strategy**

Based on the current predictive services national outlook the national 2004 fire season is expected to be near normal in terms of the expected number of fires and acres burned. However, much of the interior West is expected to experience above normal fire potential this season. As this season progresses we must continue to focus on effectively managing our people and resources to meet national priorities (Refer to Appendix 4).

The current national outlook is located at:

[http://www.nifc.gov/news/intell\\_predserv\\_forms/season\\_outlook.html](http://www.nifc.gov/news/intell_predserv_forms/season_outlook.html).

Safety is clearly tied to managing risk. The NMAC is emphasizing a constant re-examination of factors involved in limiting exposure to dangerous situations, monitoring people and equipment for fatigue, and utilizing our best skills on high priority incidents. Special attention is paid to fires transitioning from one phase to another.

- The principal mission of wildland fire management agencies is the cost effective and timely coordination of land management agency emergency response to wildland fire. As a partner in the National Response Plan and as interagency cooperators, we also provide support to non-wildland fire incidents. As directed by the President and/or Secretaries, we will meet the demands of non-wildland fire incidents. When wildland resources are insufficient to meet the demands of both non-fire and wildland fire incidents, consideration will be given to Presidential and Secretarial direction. Non-wildland fire incidents have included catastrophic weather events, support to shuttle recovery, APHIS-New Castle Disease, and 9-11 response (Refer to Appendix 5).
- All firefighting efforts and strategies must be coordinated with states, tribes, local government, and other key entities.
- Agency Administrators and Fire Program Managers should continuously evaluate restrictions on the use of various types of suppression resources and tactics on lands they manage.
- GMACs must develop “geographic strategies,” based on the current and anticipated fire situation. These strategies should focus on the entire scope of the wildland fire situation within the Geographic Area and not merely individual fires. GMAC projections must include potential to impact population centers, contingency plans and trigger points to enact them, critical resources required to mitigate the threat.
- Suppression strategies and tactics must be based on what the fire will allow us to do, not what we want to do. Allocating significant scarce resources to fires that will burn for the foreseeable future or have minimal probability of early containment should not be considered unless there is a direct threat to a community.

- To reduce unwanted ignitions and damage to communities, interagency prevention and education programs are encouraged and supported.
- It is imperative that a ready mobile reserve force be on hand and positioned, according to weather forecasts and other intelligence. A ready mobile reserve made up of critical resources for responding to national priorities will be maintained as necessary (Refer to Appendix 6).
- Emphasis will be placed on maintaining proficient and highly qualified agency and agency cooperator resources. Mobilization priorities will be adjusted as appropriate to ensure that experience goals are attained.
- Initial action is the primary mission for large fixed wing airtankers, exclusive use helicopters (with the exception of the National T2 helicopters), smokejumper aircraft, lead planes and Aerial Supervision Modules (ASM). Information from predictive services and the Geographic Areas will be used to anticipate fire danger and fire occurrence. Resources will be pre-positioned to respond to these threats. Assignments will be validated daily and aircraft will be reallocated as necessary (Refer to Appendix 7).
- It is important that GMACs recognize the credible threat that terrorists pose for intentionally ignited wildfires.



## **Actions**

These actions are endorsed by the NMAC to help facilitate the national strategy.

- NMAC will coordinate with the GMACs for placement of critical or short supply resources, including Area Commands.
- Cost Containment Plans as identified in the Large Fire Cost Reduction Action Plan, March 2003, will be implemented (Refer to Appendix 8).
- High priority tactical assignments should be made even if a resource is available for less than the usual 14-day rotation. For example, if a Type 1 crew is available only for five days, but could make a significant contribution on a fire during that time, the crew should be assigned to the incident. Resources should be used most effectively, keeping in mind national priorities.
- Innovative and creative ways of managing people and resources must be shared among Geographic Area Coordination Centers (GACCs). When something works well in one area, other areas need to know about it.
- Short teams, consisting of past Type 1 team members and existing command and staff deputy members, could be organized to manage fires that do not require a full team.
- As the fire season develops, it will be important to monitor the effects of both short-term and cumulative fatigue. It is critical that fire personnel receive adequate rest and that supervisors watch for signs of fatigue and take action to mitigate it.
- Attention should be given to balance assignment opportunities for tactical resources as well as Incident Management Teams, on a national basis.
- The effectiveness of branching an incident should be evaluated as an alternative to assigning additional Incident Management Teams.
- Early detection and aggressive initial action will continue to be our best tools to respond to terrorist ignitions.

## **NMAC / GMAC Coordination**

The NMAC will initiate conference calls with GMACs as the situation warrants.

The NMAC requires information from the GMACs to prioritize and allocate resources in accordance with the national strategy. GMACs will provide a description of the process they are utilizing in setting priorities. Additionally, they should provide an assessment of the current overall situation which includes an analysis of whether the situation should improve or deteriorate over the next seven days. Descriptions of risks associated with specific incidents that may pose a threat to communities or critical infrastructure is paramount.

When situations warrant, NMAC will require rationale and information for assignment of Type 1 Incident Management Teams and Area Command Teams (Refer to Appendix 9).

At National Preparedness Levels 4 and 5, list specific resources required to accomplish priority incident objectives and describe whether those needs can be met from within the Geographic Area or not (Refer to Appendix 10 and 11).

Updates are to be provided as the situation warrants.